



NEW DIRECTIONS
IN AFRICAN EDUCATION:
CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

Edited by S. Nombuso Dlamini

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ENVISIONING AFRICAN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Uzo Anucha

ABSTRACT

American and British models of professional social work that have been exported to Africa have been critiqued as unable to address the unique issues and cultural characteristics of the majority of Africans. Such critiques have increased as the social work profession in the Western world has failed to come up with answers to many of its own most vexing social problems. African social work educators are therefore questioning the borrowing of such “problematic” Western social work knowledge. This paper critically reviews the challenges for Africa presented by the Western-influenced social work legacy that is largely remedial in nature and underpinned by the charity and casework model that locates problems within individuals and their families. The author builds on recent scholarship as well as her experiences of schooling and working in Africa and the West, to explore how Africa, with particular reference to Nigeria, can begin a process of re-visioning and transforming its social work education and training programs.

With all the major social problems facing Africa, social work cannot continue to fiddle with minor problems. (Shawky, 1972, p. 6)

INTRODUCTION

At the start of the twenty-first century, the social work profession in the Western¹ world, particularly in North American countries such as Canada and the United States, faces unprecedented challenges. Changing demographic, political, and social trends have ushered in a practice environment that is increasingly complex, demanding, and diverse. Rossiter (1996) rightly points out that social work's foundation has been shaken and shattered by historical, social, and intellectual currents of the past two decades that have left the profession in a state of disarray and its epistemic traditions' credibility under scrutiny. While the profession grapples with these profound changes, failures of social welfare programs aimed at addressing homelessness, welfare dependency, neglect, and abuse of children, alcohol and substance abuse, crime and mental disorders are being laid on the profession's doorstep (Lindsey & Kirk, 1992).

Some have questioned Western social work's professional capability to respond effectively to these urgent demands, noting that other professionals such as social and political scientists who are unschooled in traditional social welfare concerns are providing decision-makers with most of the data they use (Howard & Lambert, 1996). These external criticisms have been paralleled by debates among social work providers that have polarized the profession. These criticisms and debates have led to an examination of the role of social work; that is, questions have been asked whether the role of social work is to change people or to change the systems that govern society. Another question that has arisen is how should it best enter the discourse of social reform? Further, questions have been asked about the contributions social work has made to epistemology and of how the profession builds the knowledge it uses to solve social problems.

The social work profession in developing² countries also faces unrelenting and mounting critique, particularly of its continued reliance on Western social work knowledge when such borrowed knowledge has been found problematic even in the environments for which it was developed. Walton and Abo El Nasr (1988) summarize the basic argument that justifies this criticism, “if the social work profession in the exporting countries fails to achieve its aims in solving the main problems in these countries, such as discrimination, unemployment, poverty, etc., how can we agree to indigenize or adapt a weak profession to the local needs and problems in the importing countries?” (p. 140). Warning of the need for caution in the borrowing of Western social work knowledge by developing countries, Hammoud (1988) also points out that social work education in developed countries is in disarray and far from consensus because of conceptual deficiencies and practical difficulties. Consequently, these difficulties raise theoretical and practical problems with the unabridged adoption of Western social work knowledge by developing countries.

American and British models of professional social work that have been exported to developing countries have been criticized for imposing Western-based practice theory in contexts where they do not fit and for reinforcing hegemony and cultural imperialism in which Western social work values, knowledge, and skills are positioned as elite and superior (Midgley, 1981). In Africa, social work education has been particularly critiqued for retaining its colonial heritage even though the critical problems and challenges the continent faces today could not have been imaginable during the colonial era. Consequently, such Western social work knowledge frequently fails to address the unique issues and cultural characteristics of the majority of Africans.

Despite the awareness of the mismatch between Western social work knowledge and the local realities of African countries, not much curriculum change has occurred to address these concerns. Therefore, a key challenge that arises from these critiques is how to transform and re-vision social work education and training in the African continent to better meet current social realities. A central question is, how can social work education in Africa develop and adopt new approaches that can support the transformation of social work practice from one that Shawky (1972) derided as “fiddling with minor problems” to social work practice that tackles the “major

social issues” of twenty-first-century Africa such as large-scale poverty, unemployment, and the social consequences of the HIV/AIDS pandemic? Related questions that have been asked by others include: what is to be done with the current Western-influenced theories and practices of social work; how best can schools of social work in Africa enter the ongoing discourse on the necessity of shifting from remedial social work to developmental social work; and, what should be the content of social work education when this shift is made? (For further questions and concerns, see Bak, 2004; Osei-Hwedie, 1993.)

This chapter contributes to the debates about the nature of social work in Africa by critically reviewing the challenges for Africa of a colonial social work legacy that is largely remedial in nature and underpinned by the charity and casework model that locates problems within individuals and their families. The chapter also examines the possibilities that a developmental social work perspective as well as indigenous knowledge might offer for re-visioning social work education and training for Africa with particular reference to Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL WORK IN NIGERIA

As the old adage of all meaningful educational theorising and best practices posits, moving from the “known to the unknown” is the best way to go about educating. (Jagusah, 2001, p. 123)

Although the *idea* of social working in Nigeria and other African countries predates colonialism, formal social work packaged as a profession with well-articulated theories began with colonization and, in some countries, after independence (Adepoju, 1974, cited in Odiah, 1991). Burke and Ngonyani (2004) point out that historically, in Africa, social welfare needs were more commonly met using resources within the community at different levels – the tribe, clan, and family systems. Odiah (1991) notes that “kinship system in the traditional Nigerian society provided for family welfare, child welfare, health, mental health, care for the aged, informal education,

recreation, social planning and development” (p. 11). Not only did the extended family meet social welfare needs but it also dealt with problematic behaviours that the community regarded as deviant by involving the wider kin, and it was not uncommon for restitution penalties to be imposed (Adepoju, 1974, cited in Odiah, 1991). Although this traditional reliance on the extended family has been considerably weakened by industrialization and urbanization, when compared with the Western world, the reciprocal obligations of family members towards one another still operate quite strongly in many Nigerian communities.

When social work as a profession was introduced in Nigeria in the 1950s and 1960s, it completely replicated the social work systems that existed in Britain and was underpinned by a colonial mentality that worked to promote the belief that anything that came from the West was superior and therefore was worthy of inclusion in Nigeria’s social and economic system. Asamoah and Beverly (1988) note that upon gaining independence from colonial powers a vast number of countries in Africa emerged with formal welfare systems similar to their erstwhile colonizers. These welfare systems differ according to the respective colonial power involved. For example, in former British colonies like Nigeria, remedial social services similar to those in the United Kingdom were established. Asamoah and Beverly further point out that it is imperative that welfare systems be examined according to their historical context so as to understand how present social welfare systems are shaped and influenced by external forces imposed before, during, and after colonization. They conclude that within the African context, modern social work practices are influenced by a mix of influences that range from early activities of missionaries, voluntary organizations, tribal societies, traditional customs and practices, pre- and postcolonial economic, political, and social realities, to social welfare policies implemented during colonial periods.

In an extensive review of the historical context of social work in Nigeria, Odiah (1991) traces the evolution of social work during colonialism and after Nigeria’s independence in the early 1960s and links it to Nigeria’s quest for modernization and industrialization, which it pursued in an attempt to emulate the successes that the Western world had experienced. This quest shaped the social welfare priorities that the country undertook, which were tilted towards programs

that benefited a newly emerging urban middle class. Odiah points out that increased government expenditure that was directed towards the provision of public housing, education, and health primarily benefited an urban elite minority.

For example, despite allocating over 20 per cent of Nigeria's revenues to education, little progress was made in rural education because the majority of the education budget funded the creation of universities and government subsidies to private education, which only benefited an urban middle class. The public housing agenda that the government pursued also failed to address the housing needs of the urban poor but favoured the urban middle class (civil servants, teachers, etc.) who could afford the high rents that the government charged in an effort to recover capital investments. Odiah further describes how the neglect of the needs of the rural majority was also felt in the provision of health care where the government chose to spend the greater proportion of the health care budget on the provision of modern hospitals in urban areas, which curtailed its ability to provide basic health services to the rural majority. The provision of health care and the curricula in the newly funded universities was modelled on Western practices.

During the transition to independence, Nigerian social welfare officials were sent to the West (Britain and America) to study and acquire the necessary skills to assume control of the administration of social welfare services when the colonial social welfare officials disengaged post-independence. The social workers who were sent to the West studied Western social work theories and methods and the administration of Western social welfare systems. Odiah points out that, despite concerns that some raised that such Western-based education and training was irrelevant to what these Nigerian social work students needed to know to practice at home, many disagreed, arguing that developing countries would eventually develop their social welfare service to Western standards. However, this reliance on Western social work knowledge did not change even after training facilities were set up in Nigeria.

Despite the widely differing issues, limitations, and opportunities that confront social workers in the West and in Africa, the legacies of Western social work education still permeate social work education and practice in Nigerian, more than four decades after independence. Jagusah (2001) confirms the challenges that previously colonized

African countries face in casting off the legacies of imperialism. In a review of the pre-colonial, the colonial, and the postcolonial periods in African education (with specific references to Nigeria and South Africa), Jagusah mocked as naïve some African intellectuals who believe that “the colonists are gone, yet they do not give heed to the colonizing structures and marginality left behind that still influences the African discourse of power and knowledge of otherness” (p. 123).

Midgley (1990) summarizes the challenges of developing countries adopting Western theories and practice approaches as including: limited relevance to the needs of developing countries; human services that are largely remedial, urban-centred, limited in scope, and informed by practice models that are inappropriate; and, social workers who have been trained in the traditions of casework but who lack the needed resources to effectively address clients’ needs.

THE CURRENT CONTEXT OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE AND EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Today, in Nigeria and many other African countries, social work is not well-recognized or valued as a profession (Burke and Ngonyani, 2004). This may be related to the fact that Nigeria has no formal social welfare system, making it difficult if not impossible for social workers to draw on any resources to assist clients whose problems are often related to or compounded by poverty. Writing for the National Institute for Social and Economic Research (NISER), Adeola aptly summarized this mismatch between what social workers have to offer and what clients really do need: “The majority of those who seek social work assistance in Nigeria are in dire need of material resources; many are destitute; unemployed, homeless, landless, illiterate, in poor health, and hungry ... the scale of absolute poverty in the society defies remedies which rely on professional counselling” (NISER, 1980, quoted in Odiah, 1991, p. 48).

Similarly, in 1980, in a very vivid and haunting description of the social situation of many of Africa’s poorest countries, the Independent Commission on Development Issues noted:

Many hundreds of millions of people in the poorer countries are preoccupied solely with survival and elementary needs. For them work is frequently unavailable or when it is, pay is very low and conditions often barely tolerable ... permanent insecurity is the condition of the poor. There are no public systems of social security in the event of unemployment, sickness or death of a wage-earner in the family ... the combination of malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, high birth rates, underemployment, and low income closes off the avenues of escape. (Brandt, 1980, quoted in Estes, 1995, p. 43)

More than two decades after the Independent Commission painted this dismal picture of the social development of Africa, considerable underdevelopment still remains, although some slight improvements have been made in reducing infant, child, and adult mortality and increasing literacy and adult life expectation (Estes, 1995).

The plight of Nigeria and its people may be one of the best contemporary examples of how historical, political, economic, social, and environmental problems can converge in severe threat to the well-being of an entire nation. According to the United Nations, Nigeria is one of many developing countries that is impeded by a vicious circle linking poverty, insecurity, and vulnerability in a context of growing inequalities (United Nations, 2003). Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and the tenth largest country by population in the world, is confronted with large-scale social deprivation. Located in West Africa, the boundaries of the country set by the British colonial powers cut across different cultural and physical spaces. Because of this arbitrary setting of boundaries, Nigeria is made up of more than 250 ethnic groups of Christian and Islamic faiths who have not always managed to co-exist peacefully. Immediately after independence in 1960, Nigerian was beset by ethno-religious conflicts, which degenerated into years of civil war when the southeast attempted to secede as Biafra. The end of civil war in 1970 coincided with the start of the oil boom years in which Nigeria became a major oil exporter.

As the world's thirteenth largest producer of crude oil and the sixth largest oil producer in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (World Bank, 2002), Nigeria derives enormous income from exporting oil. It also has significant reserves of mineral and agricultural resources as well as human capital. Despite these endowments that should ensure that Nigerians enjoy one of the highest

global living standards, the majority of the population live in extreme poverty. With per capita income falling significantly to about \$300 between 1980 and 2000 (well below the sub-Saharan average of \$450), approximately 90 million of Nigeria's 133 million people are living in absolute poverty (Nigerian National Planning Committee, 2004).

The country has no state-supported social welfare system; therefore, most people must depend on their extended families to meet the exigencies of life such as unemployment, ill-health, and sustenance during old age. Although medical care is provided to government employees and to most workers in large industrial and commercial enterprises, the rest of the population does not have this basic right. Despite several attempts at reform, the majority of Nigerians in the rural areas lack access to primary health care, in large part because the great majority of treatment centres are located in large cities. Facilities are often understaffed, under-equipped, and low on medications and other medical supplies. Patients must generally pay user fees and buy their own supplies and medications, which they often cannot afford.

The result of this lack of access to health care by the majority of the population is devastating: Nigeria has an infant mortality rate of 105 per thousand live births and a life expectancy of fifty-one years. UNICEF (2004) estimates that, at present, about one in five Nigerian children die before the age of five – the implication being that a baby born in the country is thirty times more likely to die than one born in any industrialized country. Similarly, the risk of maternal death in Nigeria is a hundred times higher than in an average industrial country. Other preventable illnesses that the government has been unable to halt include measles, whooping cough, polio, cerebrospinal meningitis, gastroenteritis, tuberculosis, bronchitis, waterborne infectious diseases, and sexually transmitted infections. Infection with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) that causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) is on the increase and becoming more prevalent. In 2001, 3.5 million Nigerians were estimated to be infected with HIV and 170,000 Nigerians died of AIDS. In 2000, the World Health Organization rated the health system at 187 out of 191 countries in the world.

In 1999, Nigeria ended fifteen years of military rule by electing Olusegun Obasanjo as president and again re-elected him in 2003. At the beginning of his presidency, President Obasanjo admitted that

reducing Nigeria's endemic poverty was one of the most challenging tasks that confronted his government. His administration launched what has been touted as a comprehensive home-grown poverty alleviation program – the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) – and has promised to reduce by half the number of Nigerians who live in poverty.

In addition to the social consequences of widespread poverty, Nigeria also faces other social issues such as gender inequity. Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (United Nations, 1979) defines discrimination against women as: “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.” Nigeria became a signatory to the convention on April 23, 1984, and also signed both the 1985 and 2001 ratifications. Despite being a signatory to CEDAW and the existence of national protections, Nigerian women still face barriers to their full participation in society. Many of the challenges facing them emerge in the context of gender-based power differences that create disparities in resources, social capital, and options for action.

Gender-based status differences create special difficulties for Nigerian women in three main areas: vulnerability to poverty through reduced access to, and control over, property and financial assets (Okeke, 2000; Pierce, 2003); increased exposure to risk for HIV/AIDS and other STDs (Adeokun et al., 2002; Eltom et al., 2002); and trafficking in women (Bamgbose, 2002). The empowerment of Nigerian women is the key goal for interventions that seek to mitigate these negative consequences for women and girls. Experience in Nigeria and other developing countries has demonstrated that increasing the empowerment and resources available to women is an effective strategy for improving social outcomes not only for women but also for their families and communities (Uduigwomen, 2004). These social issues that confront Nigerians – structural threats to the equality of women, poverty, large-scale unemployment, lack of access to basic health care and others – require social work practice that is not focused on personal deficiencies, rather, on deficiencies in societal

structures and systems that have to be remedied to allow people to develop their human potentials to the fullest capacity (Bak, 2004).

The social work profession, with its long tradition of empowering and working with marginalized people through multi-level interventions and collaborations with community-based organizations, is well positioned to contribute significantly to women's empowerment and gender equality in Nigeria. Ideally, social work programs in Nigeria should produce social work practitioners who have the skills and knowledge to develop and implement community-based interventions that address the social problems faced by Nigerian women, their families, and communities. The next section describes why social work education in Nigeria that embraces a social developmental perspective rather than a remedial focus can train a new generation of professional social workers with the necessary skills and knowledge to address the priorities of Nigerian women through prevention and intervention projects that are founded on the principles of empowerment and long-term social change. A strengthened social work education sector can better educate, prepare, and position future social workers to contribute significantly to Nigeria's national and local initiatives that address these pervasive social issues.

CHALLENGES OF A REMEDIAL SOCIAL WORK-BASED CURRICULUM FOR NIGERIA

African social work must proceed from remedial social work – foreign by nature and approach – to a more dynamic and more widespread preventive and rehabilitative action which identifies itself with African culture in particular and with socioeconomic policies of Africa in general. (ASWEA, 1982, p. 11)

The last three decades have witnessed a growing uneasiness reflected in the above call by the defunct Association of Social Work Education in Africa (ASWEA) about the dilemmas of remedial social work and the urgent need for social work education and training programs in Africa to move away from this problematic approach. Remedial social work – a legacy of colonization and the influence of Western

social work – has its roots in the Charity Organization Society model of social work that emphasized individualized social services. According to Young and Ashton (1956/1963), the Charity Organization Society movement that began in 1869 in England viewed poverty as a character and moral deficiency of the poor and the solution to poverty as reform or rehabilitation of the individual. The Charity Organization Society's focus on individual reform was in sharp contrast to that of the Settlement House Movement that began in 1884 in England. The Settlement House Movement viewed capitalism as the cause of poverty and therefore saw the solution as reform of society. Mullaly (1997) points out that the two major competing views of society and social welfare within social work emerged from these two traditions.

From the Charity Organization Society emerged a conventional social work perspective of society and social welfare that understands and links social problems to personal difficulties or, at best, immediate environmental issues. This conventional social work perspective, which Mullaly argues is the dominant/mainstream social work perspective, sees the role of social work intervention as helping people cope and adjust to existing institutions or, if necessary, modify existing policies in a limited fashion. The contribution of the Charity Organization Society to social work is a remedial model that emphasizes casework with individuals and families and focuses on the coping, adjustment, and restoration of the poor rather than the changing of social conditions. In contrast, the progressive/critical social work perspective that emerged from the Settlement House Movement argues that present social institutions are not capable of adequately meeting human needs and points to worsening social problems; growing gap between rich and poor; worsening plight of disadvantaged groups; and resurrection of conservatism in many developed countries as evidence that the present set of social arrangements does not work for large numbers of people. The contribution of the Settlement House Movement to social work includes a self-help model of community organizations that focuses on participation of the poor, community development, and social action.

The remedial model of social work focuses on personal deficiencies instead of societal deficiencies and has been increasingly criticized by scholars in the developing world, and Africa in particular, as inappropriate and irrelevant to the needs of their societies (Midgley, 1990). Burke and Ngonyani (2004) rightly point out that, though

Africa's social problems might be similar to those of developed countries (child and wife abuse, divorce, sexual assault, etc.), they are worsened and compounded by poverty as well as an unequal international economic system. The authors also note that there are certain social problems, such as inadequate food distribution, lack of access to education and health, and the prevalence of STDs and HIV/AIDS, which are unique and peculiar to developing countries. These large-scale problems demand more than a remedial social work approach. A remedial social work approach has also been criticized for being costly and using resources inefficiently. Pointing out these shortcomings in the case of South Africa, Bak also argues that individualized social work is unable to address or change the "unequal power balance and the pressure towards conformity" (2004, p. 92) that is inherent in this approach.

In an analysis of the curriculum of social work education and training programs in Nigeria, Odiah (1991) concluded that they were framed by a remedial social work approach that was based primarily on Western theories with little emphasis on courses that are relevant to the country's realities. Odiah found that less than 10 per cent of the course materials had local content. For example, teaching of social administration and policy seldom referred to local social welfare policies but focused on British social policy and administration. Courses on the history of social work similarly focused on the history of social work in Europe and North America. The curricula in the majority of the schools emphasized a remedial approach and were dominated by casework courses that were almost entirely based on American theories. Odiah points out that "curriculum content only serves to widen the gap and perpetuate the very condition of inappropriate training practices" (1991, p. 113).

The influence and unsuitability of this remedial approach of social work education and training programs in Nigeria can be clearly seen in the findings of a cross-sectional survey conducted by the country's National Institute of Social and Economic Research.³ This survey sought to understand the extent of professional social work in Nigeria by seeking the views and perceptions of forty-one social workers on various aspects of their education in Nigeria. All the respondents were employed as field workers by the Ministry of Social Development, Youth, and Culture. Despite the caveats that should accompany the findings because of sample size issues and age of data, three of

the findings of the survey reported by Odiah (1991) are particularly germane to this chapter's discussions as they emphasize that social work education and training programs in the country have not modified their curricula to adequately and appropriately address the major social problems of contemporary Nigeria.

Firstly, when asked how best the social work profession in Nigerian could positively contribute to development and poverty – two of the country's endemic social issues, a majority of respondents (60%) felt that the profession could do so by pursuing practices at the macro level such as community development, self-help, co-operatives and other micro-businesses that increase people's income. While acknowledging that social workers did not seem to have much power to influence government welfare policy, the majority of respondents (60%) felt that the profession could contribute to these issues by engaging in social planning activities. Although 80 per cent of respondents were employed as caseworkers, only 30 per cent of respondents believed that casework could adequately address the basic needs of clients while only 10 per cent agreed that casework and group work were appropriate for addressing the social problems of developing countries like Nigeria.

Secondly, when respondents were asked how effective their social work practice was with clients, considering the limited resources they had to draw from, an overwhelming majority (80%) of respondents thought the remedial social work they were engaged in where they provided help on an individual basis to clients was a band-aid that did not address the root causes of their clients' problems. For example, social workers in probation and family welfare were quite doubtful and negative in their assessment of how effective and adequate their interventions could be in addressing the underlying causes of their client's needs when such problems stemmed from pervasive poverty. The social workers who worked as probation officers reported that a majority of their clients were from economically disadvantaged communities and had become involved in criminal activities such as petty theft out of poverty. Social workers in family welfare reported that a majority of their clients lived in the poorest sections of town in inadequate housing and had very low incomes and education and faced chronic unemployment, poor health, and malnutrition. The respondents believed that a lot of the social problems their clients faced were consequences of poverty.

Finally, an overwhelming majority (80%) of respondents felt that social work as it existed in Nigeria – with no resources and framed by the remedial approach that focuses on individual casework – was incapable of contributing solutions to clients’ problems. However, a majority of respondents also said that social work had the potential of contributing to the country’s programs by engaging in developmental activities.

THE POSSIBILITIES OF A SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

The shortcomings of a remedial-based curriculum have stimulated the search and exploration of new theoretical models that might be better suited to the consequences of underdevelopment. More recently, increasing numbers of African social work educators, scholars, and practitioners are turning to a social work developmental perspective to re-vision and transform this remedial social work legacy to one that speaks to their own unique social realities. Mupedziswa (2001) argues that, if social work is to move from remedial social work to preventative and rehabilitative action, it must transform its programs within a social developmental approach starting from social work education and training. South African-born James Midgley, who has written extensively about social development and social welfare, defines social development as a “process of planned social change designed to promote the well-being of the population as a whole in conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development” (1995, p. 25). Expanding on the necessity to link the promotion of human welfare to economic development, Midgley (1997b) emphasizes the need for “policies and programmes that enhance people’s welfare and at same time contribute positively to economic development” (p. 11).

South Africa’s experience with a social developmental perspective can provide Nigeria and other African countries with important observations on the challenges and possibilities that a developmental approach offers for social work practice that is responsive to poverty, large-scale unemployment, and other big social problems. After liberation in 1994, South Africa embarked on a re-visioning of its social

welfare system informed by a developmental perspective that has involved a transformation of service provision and policy formulation, as well as a review of curricula of professional social work education (Drower, 2002). Drower reports that the White paper for Social Welfare published in 1997 by the Ministry for Social Welfare and Population Development departed from South Africa's history of a remedial and rehabilitative approach to embracing a developmental approach. Bak (2004, p. 82) points out the White Paper outlined "principles, guidelines, recommendations, proposed policies, and programmes for developmental social welfare in South Africa." Drawing from Midgley's definition of a social developmental perspective as well as the UN World Summit on Social Development that was held in Copenhagen in 1995, the White Paper emphasized the importance of linking social development and economic development.

Mupedziswa (2001) proposes benchmarks/criteria that social work education and training institutions in Africa can utilize in evaluating whether their programs are oriented towards the promotion of a social work developmental perspective. They fall into two broad categories – curriculum-related or extra-curricular activities. Curriculum-related activities involve rigorous curriculum review exercises to ensure the horizontal and vertical integration of courses. These activities may include regular field workshops and practical field work that are oriented and consistent with a developmental perspective, such as rural placements resulting in a demonstration by faculty and students of an understanding of developmental concepts such as indigenization, authentication, and social development. Further, these activities require the use of innovative teaching strategies such as seminars, role plays, guest lecturers, and self-directed projects/assignments that are consistent with a developmental orientation. Extra-curricular activities that are related to promoting a developmental perspective include the development and use of indigenous teaching materials, generation and use of local research, localization of a significant proportion of staff, employment of graduates in developmental oriented positions, and participation in national social policy development and monitoring.

BEGINNING THE PROCESS OF RE-VISIONING SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

The challenges facing twenty-first-century Nigeria, including large-scale unemployment, poverty, the AIDS pandemic, lack of access to basic health care and structural threats to the equality of women, demand a social developmental model of educating and training of social workers to better meet these major challenges. The extensive benchmarks for transforming curriculum and unlearning pedagogical practices that are more compatible with remedial social work than a developmental model described by Mupedziswa and others (Estes, 1994; Gray, 1996; Mamphiswana & Noyoo, 2000; Midgley, 1990; and Odiah, 1991) offer some concrete pragmatic frameworks that the social work profession in Nigeria can draw from to begin a dialogue on re-visioning its social work education and training programs. In addition to the important and pragmatic strategies suggested by these scholars, informed by my experiences in the Nigerian educational system in the 1980s acquiring undergraduate and graduate degrees in psychology; my experiences in the late 1990s in the Canadian educational system acquiring undergraduate and graduate degrees in social work; and a recent visit back to Nigeria in the summer of 2004 on a collaborative research project with colleagues in a Nigerian university, I tentatively suggest three core issues that this dialogue might focus on as well. I also suggest two curriculum issues that current social work programs in Nigeria can focus on to strengthen the training of a new generation of professional social workers with the necessary skills and knowledge to address the priorities of Nigeria.

First, social work education in Nigeria needs to rediscover and tap into the wealth of indigenous knowledge that abounds within local communities and integrate these into the curricula. The concept “indigenous knowledge” is sometimes used synonymously with “traditional” knowledge and “local” knowledge to differentiate the knowledge developed by a given community from that developed in formal educational institutions. To problematise these definitions an editorial from the July 1998 issue of *Indigenous Knowledge and Development Monitor* focused on three definitions of indigenous knowledge; the second and third definitions are particularly useful to my discussions. The author discusses the definition given by

Grenier (1998) that describes indigenous knowledge as “the unique, traditional, local knowledge existing within and developed around the specific conditions of women and men indigenous to a particular area” (p. 7). The other definitions incorporate and expand Grenier’s definition:

Indigenous knowledge is the sum total of the knowledge and skills which people in a particular geographic area possess, and which enable them to get the most out of their natural environment. Most of this knowledge and these skills have been passed down from earlier generations, but individual men and women in each new generation adapt and add to this body of knowledge in a constant adjustment to changing circumstances and environmental conditions. They in turn pass on the body of knowledge intact to the next generation, in an effort to provide them with survival strategies. (Birmingham, 1998, p. 3)

Social work education in Nigeria must harness and adapt these resources that exist within communities as a base for enhancing development. Izugbara et al. (2003) provide evidence of the possibilities of drawing from indigenous knowledge to address some unique social problems in Nigeria such as communal conflicts. The authors describe how they relied on the indigenous cultural and knowledge systems and values to restore peace and normalcy to two warring Nigerian local communities. Their success with this case highlights the potentials of indigenous knowledge outside areas where research has already proved beneficial such as in health, agriculture, and the environment.

Mathias (1995) provides a detailed framework that Nigerian social work educators can draw from to begin the process of increasing available information on indigenous knowledge and encouraging their application in developmental activities. This framework lays out key tasks and activities that are necessary for these two objectives to be achieved. Examples include conducting in-depth research that involves local people and focuses on recording and analyzing indigenous knowledge in order to find out how this knowledge can be applied to relevant projects addressing social needs. Mathias also suggests several ways that indigenous knowledge could be disseminated to communities such as: providing information on indigenous knowledge success stories to the media, packaging it for policy-makers

and development planners, developing manuals and case studies that demonstrate the applicability of indigenous knowledge, integrating indigenous knowledge modules into courses, and developing educational materials based on or including indigenous knowledge.

The dialogue to re-vision social work education and practice must also embrace the concept of indigenization. In contrast to the concept of authentication, which argues that social work in Africa and other developing countries needs to completely repudiate all Western influences, indigenization cautions against throwing the baby out with the bath water, arguing that Western models can be modified to suit local conditions. Walton and Abo El Nasr (1988) describe indigenization as a process that involves taking Western social work models and modifying them to suit a different cultural environment. Sometimes, this adaptation might also require consideration of both the political and socio-cultural context of the importing country.

Midgely (1981) emphasizes that the key idea in indigenization is ensuring appropriateness – of both professional social work roles and social work education – to the expectations of social work practice in a particular environment. Midgely (1990) points out that some social workers from developing countries have recognized the significance of indigenous religion and cultural beliefs and are incorporating these into their social work models. Burke and Ngonyani (2004) describe how casework is being indigenized in Tanzania to incorporate values like group self-determination with family and community involvement. These values are more appropriate in an African culture than individualistic Western values such as confidentiality and self-determination.

An important part of the dialogue on re-visioning social work education and practice in Nigeria is willingness and openness to sharing experiences with applying indigenous knowledge to contemporary problems and indigenizing Western knowledge to local conditions with international colleagues. Mamphiswana and Noyoo (2000) point out that social work education that is properly located and contextualized within indigenous African culture, tradition, and civilization will enable African scholars to contribute original products within the intellectual global village. In the current quest for internationalization of social work, driven primarily by globalization but with remnants of imperialism, exchange of best practices, theories, and resources have usually been unidirectional from the

West to developing countries. In what Midgley (1990, p. 300) correctly terms “the one-way international flow of ideas and practices,” these exchanges have frequently cast social work educators and scholars from developing countries as potential recipients, and social work educators and scholars from the West as potential donors of knowledge.

This positioning needs to be challenged by both sides actively working together to ensure that experiences of developing countries social workers are visible on the international arena. Midgley pointed out several areas in which Western social workers could learn from social workers in developing countries, despite the vast differences in the demographic, economic, and cultural characteristics of the two. The experiences of social workers in developing countries who cope and manage with scarce resources and have long experience with working across cultures, as well as extensive experience dealing with social consequences of widespread and persistent poverty, can greatly inform and enrich social work practice in Western countries.

Stressing this point, Yan (2005) suggests that Western social work educators and scholars need to “empower colleagues from the developing world and de-centre the leading role of the developed world. We need to let the voices, ideas, experience, and theoretical conceptualizations of our colleagues from the developing world be heard, not only in their own countries as an indigenous knowledge, but also in the Western world as an alternative perspective” (p. 13). Yan offers several pertinent suggestions on how social work educators and scholars from both developed and developing countries can work towards learning from each other, taking into consideration unequal access to resources. Concrete suggestions include that journals should have reviewers and editorial boards from both developed and developing countries and conferences should provide incentives that encourage developing countries’ participation such as special panels and fee waivers.

In addition to dialoguing about the three core issues discussed above, Nigerian social work education programs, at both the diploma and bachelor levels, need to focus on two pragmatic issues. The first is curriculum review using participatory research methods to identify gaps such as an overemphasis on academic content and minimal practical, culturally relevant, and community-based content and practice. This curriculum review will inform the development of

critical course components identified as missing or deficient in the programs. Examples of missing course components include: gender and development, working with rural adults, community development, and family- and community-based social work practice. Strengthening the curriculum will enable the social work education sector in Nigeria to train a new generation of professional social workers with the necessary skills and knowledge to address the priorities of Nigeria through prevention and intervention projects that are founded on the principles of long-term social change.

The second issue is the establishment of an effective field education office to better support student practicum and field work. There is a broad consensus in social work literature that field education is critical to effectively prepare students in professional programs such as social work and teaching. While in the field, students assume the dual role of learner and practitioner and are expected to take over the responsibilities accordingly. Students carry out agency assignments, observe agency policies, preserve confidentiality, provide written reports and records, and otherwise behave in an appropriate professional manner. Field education is essential in helping students integrate theories learnt in the classroom with practice.

One of the great challenges facing universities around the world is how to move from the confines of the institution into the fields, streets, and villages of their nation. Nowhere is this truer than in Nigeria, where the universities, modelled after colonial British institutions of the period, are often physically and programmatically removed from the needs of the poor and marginalized. While such separation is regrettable anywhere, in the context of Africa, where so much is needed and there is so little infrastructure and expertise available, it is simply unacceptable. An effective field education program will help social work students build a bridge between the academic world and the real world inhabited by the vast majority of Nigerians.

In conclusion, the challenges facing twenty-first-century Nigeria demand a re-visioning of Nigeria's social work education from a remedial model towards a social developmental one. To begin re-visioning social work education and training programs, Nigerian professionals need to draw on new dialogues. Particularly, professionals must seek to integrate some of the extensive benchmarks for transforming curriculum and pedagogical practices to be more compatible with remedial social work in Nigeria. These advances described by

several authors offer concrete pragmatic frameworks that the social work profession in Nigeria can draw from. In addition to these, I have suggested three core issues that this dialogue might focus on. First, social work education in Nigeria needs to rediscover the value of indigenous knowledge and integrate these into the curricula. In addition to recognizing the value of indigenous knowledge, social work education must also embrace the concept of indigenization of Western knowledge. Finally, Nigeria must be willing to share its experiences with applying indigenous knowledge to contemporary problems and indigenizing Western knowledge to local conditions within the international community. I have also suggested two pragmatic issues that current social work programs need to focus on. The first is a curriculum review using participatory research methods to identify gaps. The second is establishment of an effective field education office to better support student practicum and field work.

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Notes

- 1 The term "Western" refers to countries with advanced industrial development, for instance, the G7. However, very often in social work literature, "developed countries" are used interchangeably with "the West" or "Western countries" or "the North." Very often these terms are loosely defined. Since it is not the intention of this chapter to define these terms, I will use them interchangeably to signify a group of Anglophonic industrial countries.
- 2 Some people use "Third World" or "the South" to describe countries that are economically underdeveloped. In this paper, for consistency, "developing" is used to signify the process of development.
- 3 For an extensive description of survey methodology, see National Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1982, in Odiah (1991).